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SUCCESS STORY

“THIS CENTER IS PART OF THE COMMUNITY...”

USAID/Colombia Funding Helps Establish Greatly-Needed Community Centers

“The Center is part of the community ... and provides the people with a sense of belonging.” Héctor Manuel Lozano



*The Citizen Coexistence Center
Aguachica, César, Colombia.
Photo: IOM*

Héctor Manuel Lozano is 35 years old and works full-time as Coordinator of the Citizen Coexistence Center in Aguachica, in south César, Colombia. Héctor was born and raised in this municipality. He knows it intimately.

The Citizen Coexistence Centers (Centros de Convivencia) are part of the Program to Strengthen Peace in Colombia, supported by USAID/Colombia, with the technical assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The center in Aguachica was created to offset the violence that devastated the community for many years. Long-standing conflict between illegal armed groups produced murders and other horrific crimes. And it produced a climate of tension and conflict that exacerbated the stresses of everyday life. The Aguachica Center provides a safe place for a respite from all this.

Telling Our Story

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At the Center, citizens participate fully and freely in the wider life of the community. Here they have access to social assistance programs. The Center also helps to generate programs to make government more available and better-understood. Needless to say, the programs and services of the Center exert a positive impact on the community.

Héctor, who is a Public Administration Technician, explains that creating such a safe environment allows citizens who have been traumatized to experience a more humane, tolerant, sensitive and respectful sense of community.

The Center serves as a focal point and anchor. Hector says, “The Center is part of the community ... and it provides the people with a sense of belonging.”

At the Center, people are treated with respect. Each service provided is also followed up so that citizens are not “allowed to fall through the cracks.” When service-providers are not able to solve a problem, they provide clients with viable alternatives.

“When a person visits the Center, he or she finds officials who are socially sensitive because they have been trained for that purpose. The Center design is pleasing to the eye, provides free services, and works with many other institutions, making it an open space with credibility. And is always available for the community,” he affirms proudly.

On a personal level, the Center symbolizes Héctor’s own journey toward growth and achievement. In terms of his professional life, it represents welcome growth challenges that allow him to make a difference in the life of his community. In this role he is proud to be able to:

- **Identify Community Needs**
- **Generate Beneficial Community Solutions**
- **Embrace and Restore Community Identity**
- **Support Citizen Participation**
- **Promote Peaceful Conflict Resolution**